

The President. I caught you. [Laughter] I love coming to see the people—the people that line the roads, the people that are waving. That’s what I love, because it reminds me of how strong this country is. It reminds me that in Greenville, North Carolina, good people live.

And why is that important? I’ll tell you why it’s important. Because the great hope for the country comes when people turn to a neighbor and say, “What can I do to help?”—turns to a neighbor in need. That’s the strength of America. Our great strength is not necessarily found in our halls of government; it’s found in hallways in schools, where teachers dedicate themselves to teaching a child. It is found in hallways of churches and synagogues, where folks hear the universal call to love a neighbor just like they would be loved themselves. No, the strength of this country—the strength of this country in the hearts and souls of our people. It’s when a Boy Scout leader says to a young child—says to a young child, “You know, there’s right decisions to make and wrong decisions, and I want to help you understand a right decision.”

It happens when somebody—somebody takes time out of their life to mentor a child. I hope—I hope when you hear of a mentoring program right here in eastern North Carolina that you say, “I’d like to help.” There are some children in our society who wonder whether or not the American Dream is meant for them. And that’s going to require a loving soul, putting their arm around that child and saying, “Somebody cares about you. Somebody wants you to know that there is love in our society.”

The problem is, everybody expects the Federal Government to do it. But the Governments can’t make people love one another. No, Government can hand out money, but we cannot put love in people’s hearts, or hope in people’s lives. That’s done when loving citizens take time out of their lives to help make their communities and their neighborhoods as strong as it possibly can be.

This debate in Washington, DC, on taxes is fundamental to the country. It not only talks about economic vitality, but it really speaks to—we ought to trust the people. We ought to trust the people with their own money, and we ought to trust the people of America to provide the compassion necessary to make sure this great land fulfills its promise for every citizen who is lucky enough to be an American citizen.

I’m honored that you let me come and share my hopes for our country with you. I call upon you, that when Senators start to vote, for example, on budgets, you might remind them of whose money they’re spending.

And I want to conclude by telling you what a huge honor it is to be the President of the greatest land on the face of the Earth.

Thank you for coming. God bless, and God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:49 p.m. in Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium at East Carolina University. In his remarks, he referred to Richard Eakin, chancellor, East Carolina University.

Remarks on Parental Empowerment in Education *April 12, 2001*

Thank you very much. Please, be seated.

Well, Reverend Flake, thank you very much. It’s an honor to be with you again.

This city really misses Floyd Flake. But Jamaica, Queens, is better off for him being there. [Laughter] He's a visionary. He understands a different kind of power than politics. And the community in which he is associated is better off, and I'm honored he's here. And I want to thank all the leaders who are here, as well, and I want to thank you all for coming. I really appreciate the contributions toward educational excellence that the folks on this stage are making and that you all are making all across the country. It's an honor to have you at the White House.

I believe this—and I know we share the same principle—that no child, whatever their parents' income or whatever their background, should be condemned to a failing school. Our public schools have put generations of the disadvantaged and generations of immigrants on the path to a better life. They are essential institutions. But too many are in trouble.

Just a week ago we learned that less than a third of the Nation's fourth grade students are proficient at reading. And there is a growing gap between the highest achieving readers and those who scored the lowest on the test. Students who score in the top 10 percent of the NAEP, the National Assessment of Educational Progress exams, scored slightly higher than in 1992, while those in the bottom 10 percent scored lower.

This is a serious problem that requires serious focus and a serious effort of change. We have spent \$125 billion of Title I money over 25 years, money spent on low-income students. And if the truth be told, we have little to show for it. This is not just wasted money; more importantly, it is wasted potential and wasted hope.

America's schools are increasingly separate and unequal, and that is unacceptable in our great land. We must do more than tinker around the edges. We must all come together and fight for real reform and real change. Effective education reform requires both pressure from above and competition

from below. We must challenge schools with higher standards and arm parents with better options.

I'm asking that every State have a real accountability system, meaning that they test every child, every year, in grades three through eight, on the basics of reading and math. Without yearly testing, we don't know—we don't know who's falling behind and who needs help. Without yearly testing, too often we don't find failure until it is too late to fix.

One of the greatest benefits of testing is the information it gives to parents. Given that information, more parents will be involved, becoming participants, not spectators, in the education of their children. Armed with that information, parents will have leverage to force reform.

Yes, we also need to empower parents by giving them more options and more influence. And my administration, with the help of a lot of folks—some of them Republicans, a lot of them Democrats—[laughter]—are pushing toward that goal. I don't view this as a partisan issue. I view this as incredibly important public policy that rises above politics. People on the Hill who will decide the shape of the Federal legislation must understand that supporting parents and giving them options is not a partisan issue; it's a people issue. And here's some ideas that I hope the Congress listens to.

First, I'm an enthusiastic supporter of charter schools. Charter schools are beginning to change our understanding of public education, no question about it. These schools are public, because they're publicly funded and publicly accountable for results. The vision of parents and teachers and principals determines the rest. And the competition charter schools oftentimes provide can serve as an agent to strengthen other schools. You see, you hear a lot of talk about, well, we can't have charter schools or choice because some school is

going to be left behind. That's got it backwards. [*Laughter*] Excellence in neighborhoods means excellence in another neighborhood. It means raising the bar.

Ours is an administration that wants the Congress to provide funding to assist charter schools with startup costs, facility costs, and other needs associated with high quality schools. My budget offers 150 million in additional funding next year for the priority of encouraging the growth of charter schools all around the country.

Secondly, the education proposal I submitted to Congress gives alternatives for students trapped in persistently dangerous schools. States must report to parents whether or not the schools are safe. And if safety does not improve, students must get the option of attending another public school.

Third, Congress is considering legislation that would allow Title I funding to follow children after a failing school has failed to improve after a reasonable period of time. If a child—if a school receives Title I funding and progress is not being made—in other words, the school refuses to change; the schoolchild is trapped in failure—then the money, the Federal money attributable to that child, should follow the child. And the parent should be able to make a choice of any kind of school that he or she wants to send her child to.

I vigorously campaigned on this idea because I think it is right. And it's an idea that I remain strongly committed to. I don't believe the Federal Government should fund persistent failure. I think there's a role for Federal Government in funding education, but we need to do better than we've done in the past. We need to encourage accountability. And when we find success, we need to thank the teachers and principals. When we find failure, we must give parents different options—different options.

We've also submitted a plan to increase education savings accounts, to expand them from \$500 to \$5,000 a year. And parents will be able to use these funds for any

educated-related expense, from kindergarten to college and beyond.

The goal of these reforms is to ensure that every child in every school receives a quality education. That's the goal. And it's time we moved beyond the old arguments and old divides to make sure that we fulfill our duty that no child in America is left behind. It is time to set aside the old partisan bickering and finger-pointing and name-calling that comes from freeing parents to make different choices for their children. We can do better in America—we can do better.

I realize that all the differences between parties and people on different sides of the choice issue will not dissolve overnight. I understand that, and so do you. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't continue to fight for good ideas and herald a philosophy that is eminently fair and hopeful and optimistic for every single child, regardless of their neighborhood or their income status.

That's what this is all about. It's really about the promise of America, what America should be about. And that's providing hope and opportunity for every single citizen, regardless of where you're from.

There are some encouraging signs; there are. Slowly but surely, people are beginning to understand the logic behind accountability, the understanding that we can't accept failure, the need to trust individuals to make right decisions for their children. Slowly but surely, people are hearing that message. And I want to thank you for your help.

I have come to realize that ordinary folks can have a big influence on the process in Washington, DC, that ours is a responsive democracy, and that you're only one e-mail away—[*laughter*]—from telling somebody how you think. And it's helpful—it's helpful. We're doing the right thing. We're doing the right thing for our country.

I believe we can get positive results out of the Congress. I believe we can make progress toward reforming a system that is working in some places and not working

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in others. I know we can have quality education for every child. And when we do, this great land of ours—by the way, the greatest Nation on the face of the Earth—will be even greater. We'll be even greater.

Thank you for coming, and God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:35 a.m. in Presidential Hall at the Dwight D. Eisen-

hower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to former Representative Rev. Floyd H. Flake, senior pastor, Cathedral of the Allen A.M.E. Church in Jamaica, New York. The President also referred to Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (Public Law No. 103-382), which amended Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Public Law No. 89-10).

Remarks on Signing a Proclamation Commemorating the Birth of Thomas Jefferson

April 12, 2001

Good afternoon. Welcome. Welcome back, Thomas. [*Laughter*] Senator Warner and Senator Allen, it's good to see both. Congressman Goode, welcome. The first lady of the Commonwealth of Virginia, it's good to see you again. And I want to thank all the descendants of Thomas Jefferson who are here. I want to thank the Jefferson scholars who are here. I want to thank my fellow Americans who are here. Welcome to the White House.

As the White House's latest tenant, it is my pleasure to say, welcome back, Thomas Jefferson. Most people don't realize this, but Thomas Jefferson and I share a hobby: we both like to make up words. [*Laughter*] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, Mr. Jefferson contributed more new words to the language than any other U.S. President. I especially like his term for barbaric pirates, "barbaresques." [*Laughter*] I'm also impressed by his words "debarrass" and "graffage."

The other day I tried a new word for our press corps, "misunderestimate." [*Laughter*] It's not quite in Jefferson's league, but I am giving it my best shot. [*Laughter*]

As you know, I've been trying to reduce taxes. Thomas Jefferson and I agree here, as well. He warned that government must expend the public money with the same care and economy we would practice with our own and impose on our own citizens no unnecessary burdens. That's something for all of us to think about, especially Members of the House and the Senate. [*Laughter*]

Jefferson can be quoted by the hour. He lived a long time ago, yet he still speaks directly to the present. Few former Presidents survive more vividly in our memories. And we feel his presence especially strongly in this place.

This is the room where Jefferson's Secretary, as Mr. Jefferson accurately pointed out, Meriwether Lewis, had his office in his bedroom, right here in this room. And it was here he embarked on his great expedition to the Pacific.

In this house, Jefferson famously wore his carpet slippers to receive the British King's Ambassador. In the Green Room, he delighted his guests with his insights into science and philosophy and law—any subject, except what Jefferson called the hated occupation of politics.